

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

BALTIMORE 18, MARYLAND

MERGENTHALER LABORATORY  
FOR BIOLOGY

Marine Biological Laboratory  
Woods Hole, Mass.  
August 26, 1955

Dr. Joshua Lederberg  
Department of Genetics  
University of Wisconsin, College of Agriculture  
Madison 6, Wis.

Dear Josh:

Rest assured that your letter of June 26 suggesting that it would be a fine thing for the AIBS to undertake the preparation of an adequate biological dictionary has not gone unheeded. I would have answered sooner but for the slue of meetings I had to attend during June and July, and the approaching meetings to get ready for.

I am in hearty sympathy with your idea, the more so since it happens to be the very thing I proposed as highly necessary when I took part in a symposium of the International Union of Biological Sciences at Rome in April. Not only is it necessary, it seems to me, to define more accurately the current meanings of terms used in the biological sciences, but it is also necessary to include the vast numbers of symbols and partially adopted but not standardized abbreviations that are often used without explanation to the reader. Many biologists complain that they can't read papers in genetics intelligently because of our symbols and terms. I find it equally bad, indeed worse, in biochemistry, where the invention of new abbreviations seems to be at the rate of two or three per paper. When a single article uses DNP and DPN frequently in the same discussion, who is unable to avoid becoming confused. I have seen biochemists following one another at a symposium use the same 3-letter abbreviation for totally different compounds.

Of course, that is not what you had in mind, but I think the two objectives can be handled together. I will propose this to the Executive Committee and to the Governing Board of the AIBS, and if we can secure the funds, we will start in right away. We need something of the kind to replace the lost part of ~~program~~ program which was preparation of the Handbook of Biological Data, and which the NRC refused to give up when our separation took place.

Best regards to Esther and to you. I hope to see you at East Lansing if you are there. I enjoyed meeting your brother recently at Cold Spring Harbor.

Very sincerely yours,

*Bentley*  
Bentley Glass  
President, AIBS.